



State of New Jersey

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

DIVISION OF EPIDEMIOLOGY, ENVIRONMENTAL AND OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH

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Governor

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Lt. Governor

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Commissioner

November 30, 2012

Dear Health Care Providers and Public Health Professionals:

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) established National Influenza Vaccination Week (NIVW) in 2005 to highlight the importance of continuing flu vaccination through the holiday season and beyond. This flu season NIVW is scheduled for December 2 – 8, 2012. Historically, vaccination activity drops quickly after the end of November. However, flu activity usually peaks in January or February in the United States and can last as late as May. The New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) Vaccine Preventable Disease Program would like to dispel the myth that vaccination beyond the holidays is “too late.” As long as flu viruses are spreading and causing illness, vaccination should continue and can provide protection against the flu.

The CDC recommends a yearly flu vaccine for everyone 6 months of age and older as the first and most important step in protecting against flu viruses. While flu vaccine is not 100% effective, it offers the best protection we have against this serious disease. For millions of people each year, the flu can bring a fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle aches, and fatigue. More than 200,000 people are hospitalized in the United States from flu complications each year. The flu also can be deadly. Between 1976 and 2007, CDC estimates that annual flu-associated deaths in the United States ranged from a low of about 3,000 people to a high of about 49,000 people.

Although NIVW efforts focus on ensuring all people understand the benefits of vaccination, another goal is to communicate the importance of vaccines for people who are at high risk for developing flu-related complications. People at high risk include children younger than 5 years, people 65 years of age and older, pregnant women, and people with certain long-term medical conditions, such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease, neurological and neurodevelopmental conditions, blood disorders, morbid obesity, kidney and liver disorders, HIV or AIDS, and cancer. For these people, getting the flu can mean more serious illness, including hospitalization, or it can mean a worsening of existing chronic conditions.

There are other people for whom vaccination is especially important—people who live in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities and people who live with or care for those at high risk for complications from the flu. Health care workers are recommended to receive the flu vaccine to reduce influenza-related illness and death, especially among patients at increased risk for severe flu complications. Since children under the age of six months are too young to

receive the flu vaccine, parents and/or guardians should get a flu shot to protect themselves and their baby.

Vaccine supplies are ample this year. There are many choices available for the flu vaccine, both in terms of where to get vaccinated and what vaccine to get. Flu vaccines are offered in many locations, including doctor's offices, clinics, health departments, retail stores and pharmacies, and health centers, as well as by many employers. This season, the regular flu shot is available with the nasal spray vaccine. The nasal spray is an option for healthy, non-pregnant people 2-49 years of age. There is also a "high-dose" vaccine for people 65 years of age and older and an intradermal vaccine with a much smaller needle that is approved for use in people 18 to 64 years old. All of these are approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and are safe and effective. Millions of doses of influenza vaccine have been delivered to people safely for decades. Once vaccinated, you can enjoy this holiday season knowing that you have taken the single best step to protect yourself and your loved ones against flu!

The CDC has a wealth of information about NIVW and flu available through its web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/nivw>. We ask that you make use of these valuable materials in promoting flu vaccination within our communities during NIVW and for the remainder of the flu season.

To locate a flu clinic, please visit the NJDHSS Find a Flu Shot website at <http://www.nj.gov/health/flu/findflushot.shtml>. For general flu information and resources, please visit <http://nj.gov/health/flu/generalinfo.shtml>.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Barbara Montana MD".

Barbara Montana MD, MPH, FACP
Medical Director
Communicable Disease Service
New Jersey Department of Health